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ABSTRACT

A structural approach to world history, embodied in a ninth grade required course, is outlined in this course description. The fundamental concept of the course is that history is a process of development, and this process is analyzed in terms of a study of the basic factors in historical development. The most useful of these factors are mentioned: unification, specialization (division of labor), interdependence, regulation or government, communication, transportation, and the development of values. These subjects are traced individually from prehistorical times to the present, with emphasis on inductive methods and student discovery of valid generalizations and interpretations. The objectives and values of such an approach are described as: 1) provides students with broader and deeper historical perspective; 2) gives students a framework for interpreting information in other courses and in current history; 3) increases retention of information by adding meaning and relatedness; and 4) helps them participate more intelligently in their own period of history. Excerpts from student evaluations of the course are included. (JIB)

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A STRUCTURAL APPROACH TO WORLD HISTORY

Some years ago when I first read Bruner's The Process of Education, I was curious as to what he would consider as "structure" in history. I gather from certain things I have read and heard that I am not alone in this situation. However, this spring I had occasion to write to Ralph Cordier and enclosed a description of a new course in history which we are developing at Friends' Central School and about which we are very enthusiastic. A few days later I was much surprised to receive a letter from Ralph saying, "Your course fits in perfectly with plans I have for one of the section meetings at the National Council in Cleveland next November. I would like to have you speak on the Structural Approach to World History." That made me feel like the sixth grader who came home from school one day and said he had learned what prose was and was surprised to discover he'd been speaking it all his life! All I can say is that if our course is structural then I am all for the structural approach. We have introduced it simply because we feel it makes sense and will give our students a better understanding of history. After rereading Bruner, our course does seem to fit in some ways with what he describes as the structural approach. So, though I have no doubt there are other ways of applying the structural approach in history, I am happy to present ours as one possible example.

The fundamental concept of the course is that history is a process of development. The course is a study of the basic factors in historical development. F rst to see if we can discover what they are and then to figure out how they work and their implications and applications. And I say "study" deliberately as opposed to "learning" the events of history. What we are primarily concerned with is that students discover how history works. The method is inductive as far as possible - getting the students to raise questions, work out generalizations, and their interrelations, and then to test them and apply them. Actually, part of our evaluation of a student's achievement is based on the questions he asks. As long as we have to give grades we believe they should reflect the questions students ask as well as those they answer. A thoughtful and significant question rates as much credit in our book as a good answer since one of our main objectives is to get students thinking and asking questions. The course is now given in the first

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semester of the ninth grade. Then in the course in ancient history in the second semester of ninth, modern world history in tenth, American history in eleventh, and contemporary problems in twelfth - all of which are required for all of our students - they have a basic structure on which they can place and by which they can evaluate the events and problems that they study. We are also working on the introduction of these fundamental processes in social studies classes in our elementary school so they will be constantly expanded and reapplied as our students advance.

What lead us to develop the course? To answer this I would ask you what you tell your students when they ask, "What's the use of studying history?" I would venture to guess that many, if not most of us, would reply, "The value of history is that knowledge of the past helps us to understand the present." If this is true, and I believe it is, then it would seem logical to ask ourselves, "What are the things in the present which we most need to understand?" And then plan our program in history to provide these understandings. In any case this is the way in which we developed our version of a structural approach. This year, for example, we began the course by having each student submit his ideas on the major problems and possible contributions of the period of history in which he will have a part. Then we planned the course to include those factors and processes of historical development which would be most helpful in understanding these problems and possible contributions.

What are these "fundamental processes"? In our mind the most significant and influential factors in historical development, and hence those most useful, if not essential, for understanding and using history are unification, specialization or division of labor, interdependence, regulation or government, communication, transportation, and the development of values. No doubt there are others which might be included, and which we may come to include, but these are the ones we have studied so far. As is obvious all of these are closely interrelated. Nevertheless for clarity's sake we use a topical organization and trace each one separately from its earliest beginnings to the present, and then discuss possible developments for the future.

I will try to explain as briefly as possible some of the main developments in each and

First, Unification: When man first appeared upon the earth the typical group or unit of population was the family and the number of units was great, perhaps in the order of tens or hundreds of thousands. Very slowly the family expanded into what we might call the clan with tens of thousands of such units. Then the clan into the tribe with thousands of these. Very recently, speaking historically, tribes became united into nations and that is the typical unit now with only a few over one-hundred of them in the world today. Hence we can say there has been a process of unification going on throughout history in which men have united into larger and larger units and the number of units has grown smaller and smaller.

Moreover, one of the most significant developments in current history is the steadily increasing number of functions that are being conducted on an international basis, in which process national boundaries are being slowly dissolved, and the world is becoming still further united. I need only mention all the activities that are being carried on by the United Nations on a world basis, though there are many more carried on by other governmental and non-governmental organizations. Social Education for January of this year said there were over 6600 international meetings held in 1964.

At this point in the course we have a unit on internationalism as such, covering its growth, the forces that are causing it, and those that hold it back. Though courses and units on international relations are numerous we have yet to discover any on internationalism as an historic development. This seems strange in view of its importance at this stage of history. We feel that this unit is extremely important to give our students an understanding of what is going on in the world today and to help them to take their part intelligently and effectively in it. However, that is another story so I will not go into it here. The present point is that for about a million years a process of unification has been going on which has reduced the number of independent units in the world from a range of perhaps a hundred thousand to just over a hundred, and these in may ways are now being united into one. This seems to us one of the most significant processes in history and one of the first things our students should be familiar with if they are going to

of the development of international cooperation today, in the light of this whole process, they can see the problems with a much more valid historical perspective. We feel this perspective can be one of the most valuable contributions of history.

Now let's consider specialization. In the family there was little specialization except between the sexes and different age groups. However with the unification into larger groups men could specialize in particular crafts which resulted in greater efficiency.. Here is the sort of thing about which the students are encouraged to work out, or discover for themselves, the obvious generalizations and interrelations, such as for example, "Unification makes possible specialization." Specialization increases efficienty." "The larger the unit the more specialization there can be." The last is of course the basis of the assembly line in modern industry where individual specialization is carried to its ultimate extreme as well as specialization by nations on the basis of climate, natural resources and industrial skills. Here students "discover" one of the most important and useful generalizations in history. "Specialization increases interdependence." This provides an opportunity for a very significant discussion of the interdependence of men and nations in our modern industrial economy as compared to the independence of the cave man or the pioneer on the frontier. And what a lot of implications that has! But the most valuable one is that, "Interdependence makes necessary cooperation or regulation."

These generalizations may seem so obvious and simple that they need not be mentioned. Actually they are implicit in all of history. However this is exactly the object of the course - to make what is implicit explicit so that students will become so familiar with the basic processes of history they will recognize them and make use of them in studying particular periods of history and current problems as well as in their thinking about the future.

Cooperation is rather difficult to trace historically but maybe we will get to that some day. However where voluntary cooperation is inadequate to provide the coordination made necessary by interdependence compulsory regulation or government fulfills this function. So we trace the development of government from the tribal council and chief through monarchy to totalitarianism and democracy.

which has been made necessary by and increased in proportion to, increasing interdependence. Then, when students are confronted with the tremendous expansion of government in recent history, they can recognize that it is not just a result of a greed for power on the part of politicians but an inevitable corolary of increased specialization and interdependence.

What about communication? For man, communication began with the development of speech and was limited at the start to the distance over which a man's voice could be heard. With the invention of writing in ancient times its range was multiplied tremendously both in space and time. The invention of printing in the Renaissance multiplied it many times more. From then until the development of electrical and electronic communication in our own times there was little change, but with the invention of the telegraph, telephone, radio and television, instantaneous worldwide communication and even vision are now very generally available. What are the implications of this for history? Communication as the sharing of information and ideas and values is certainly one of the fundamental processes of history. How is the amount and speed of communication related to unification and to the rate of historical change? These are the kinds of questions we find students are really excited about discussing, but what is more important, I am convinced that in discussing them they discover for themselves historical insights that are both useful and lasting.

The same sort of questions arise in connection with the study of how man has increased his ability to transport himself and his goods around the world and into space from a speed of about two miles per hour on foot to twenty thousand miles per hour by rocket. Or how he has harnessed the forces of nature to multiply the power available to do his work and produce the goods and services he needs, or desires, from one man power to one hundred or more horsepower per man, which he has in the modern industrial nations. But there isn't time to go into those now. I hope I have said enough though to give you an idea of how we are approaching world history on what may be considered a structural basis.

However there is one other aspect of our course that I would like to present for your consideration. Though it is not essential for teaching history in this way we believe it strengthens it greatly. I said earlier that we teach each of the above processes from its earliest beginnings. This is certainly logical if you are to give as complete an understanding and appreciation of each process as possible. This presents the fact that most of these processes that are fundamental in human history were present in nature long before man and are fundamental in the evolution of man himself. For example, life began in the form of one celled organisms and the unification of these into many celled organisms was a fundamental process in the evolution of man. Hence we have to say that the process of unification is a fundamental process in nature which simply continues in human history on a new level. Specialization of cells was made possible by the unification of single celled animals into many celled animals, and the specialization of cells is as fundamental a process in biological evolution as in social evolution as well as being highly analogous to it. The specialization of cells greatly increased their efficiency and led to their interdependence and the need for coordination just as specialization by men was to do much later. Therefore we begin with a consideration of these processes in biological development because we believe it will give our students a better understanding and appreciation of them to see how they have occurred in nature as well as in human history. We won't insist that you go back this far, though, if you want to use this approach, even though we are convinced of its validity and its value!

However far you take it, this is a rather new kind of history and among ourselves we have come to call it "the new history". That may be presumptive, but at least as far as we have discovered it is new in the general sense of the word. If there are others who are teaching history in this way, or would like to, we are eager to know of them so we can work together on it. In any case the course is similar to "the new math" in that just as some find it difficult to recognize that as math I imagine some may find it difficult to recognize this as history! But much more significantly I think it is new in the current use of the word to mean, as Bruner puts it, "giving students an understanding of the fundamental structure of a subject".

As to whether it is history or not, that obviously depends upon how you define the word. If you take it to mean the written accounts of what men have done since they were able to record their doings then much of it does not fall within that category. If you take it to mean what has happened in the past, whether reveled by written records or the sciences - archaeology, anthropology, paleontology, or biology, - then this is history. However we believe that, whether it is called history or not, it is the most effective way in which we can help students to understand how things have happened in the past and thus get a clearer insight into how they are happening in the present so they can then make their most intelligent and effective contribution to the future. Incidentally in connection with the future one of the points we emphasize is that though men have been on the earth for about a million years astro-physicists estimate that the earth would be inhabitable for at least several hundred million years more. Hence, barring atomic anihilation, man's potential history has only barely begun. We believe that to have any valid perspective on history it must be looked at as a whole, and therefore this fact must enter into any historical evaluations.

Now what do the students think about it? At the end of the course last year we asked those students who took it to write what they thought about the course. Since they could submit their comments anonymously they could be perfectly candid. I think it is significant that their reactions were unanimously either favorable or enthusiastic. Here are some of their comments:
First one as to the method: "In the normal history course I tend to become bored but in the new history I am always stimulated. The discussions we have are rewarding because we are always discovering something. The new discoveries we make are more interesting because we have found them out ourselves. What we may learn or discover in one class mat be of use throughout our course because we continually relate what we have learned with new material. I think the new history is much more meaningful and significant than the way history is usually taught."

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Then one as to content: "Personally, I'd prefer to just drop history, but since nobody is going to let me I might as well get as much out of it as I can. I don't plan to remember to my dying day

when the Carthaginians were conquered. I plan to forget it as soon as the next test is over. But the new history is just principles which will help me greatly in my adult life. This course made me much more aware of unification and specialization and all of the effects of these trends which are shown in our society today. I think this course is different from other courses in that all of the things we have learned are not crammed so that we will pass the exam but material which will help our political conscience mature until it has reached a proper evaluation of our society."

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One as to use: "It makes you think for yourself instead of reading and memorizing facts from a book, which you forget in a matter of weeks. The new history is something you don't forget if you understand it. I think every student should have the opportunity of having the new history to prepare himself for the study of history in future classes."

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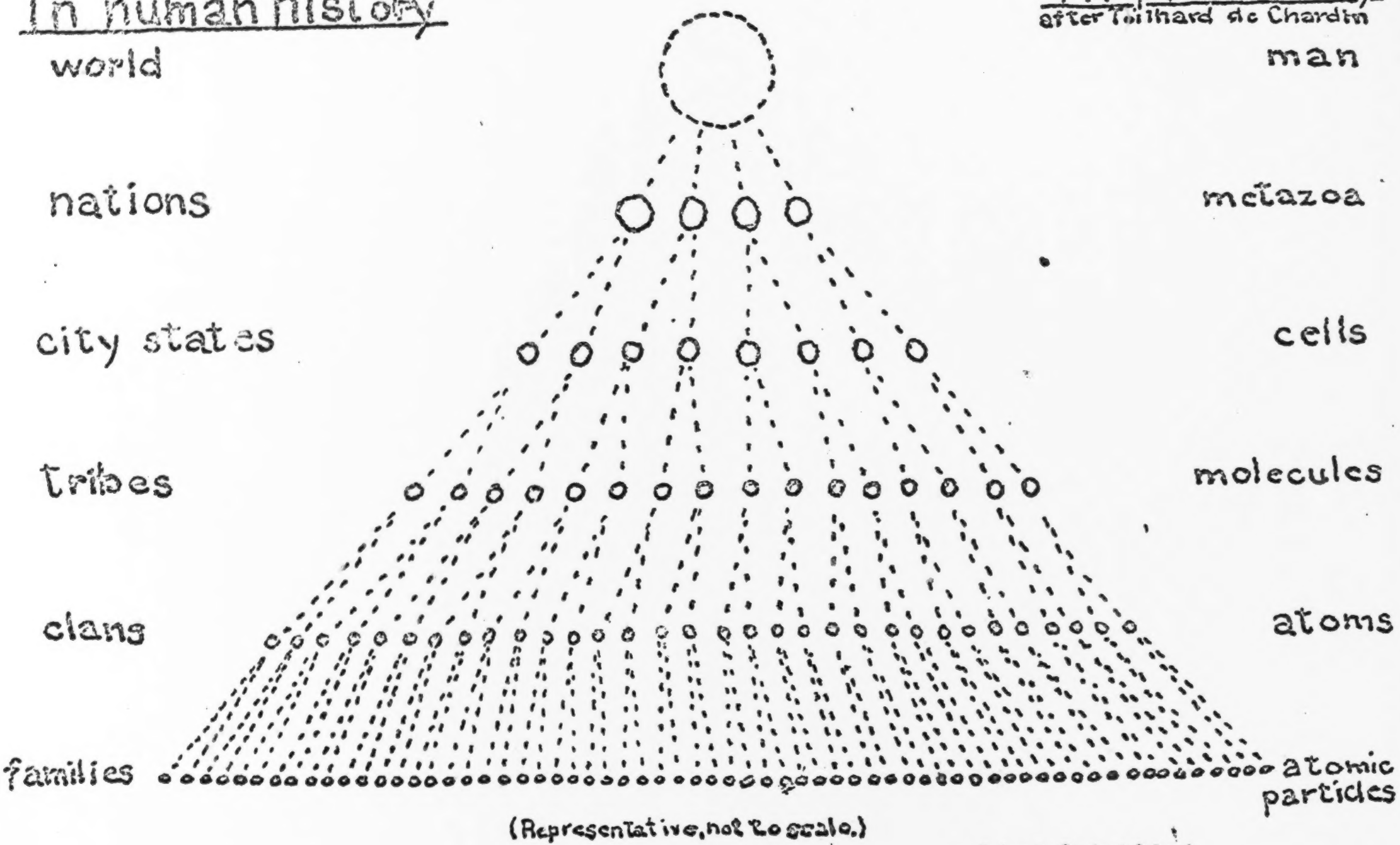
And a final one: "The course we have been studying this year has been exciting." I can only agree. As for myself it is the most exciting and I believe the most valuable course I have taught in forty years of teaching. So I am naturally very enthusiastic about a structural approach. However, not to leave the evaluation of the course to the students, though I believe their comments are very significant. In conclusion let me summarize the objectives and values we believe this kind of approach offers. First, it gives students a much broader and deeper historical perspective which we feel is one of the greatest values the study of history should contribute. Second, it provides students with a framework or structure on which they can place . and by which they can make sense out of all the multiplicity of conflicting events and problems they will study in future courses and which they see going on in current history. Thirdly, it will increase students' retention of whatever information they do assimilate by adding meaning and relatedness to what they study. And fourth, by familiarizing students with the basic processes of history it will help them both to participate more intelligently in their own period of history and contribute more effectively to future history.

For these reasons I feel very strongly that in any endeavor to improve the teaching of world history this type of approach should be given very serious consideration and the most thorough exploration possible.

Mark F. Emerson

UNIFICATION



(Representative, not to scale.)

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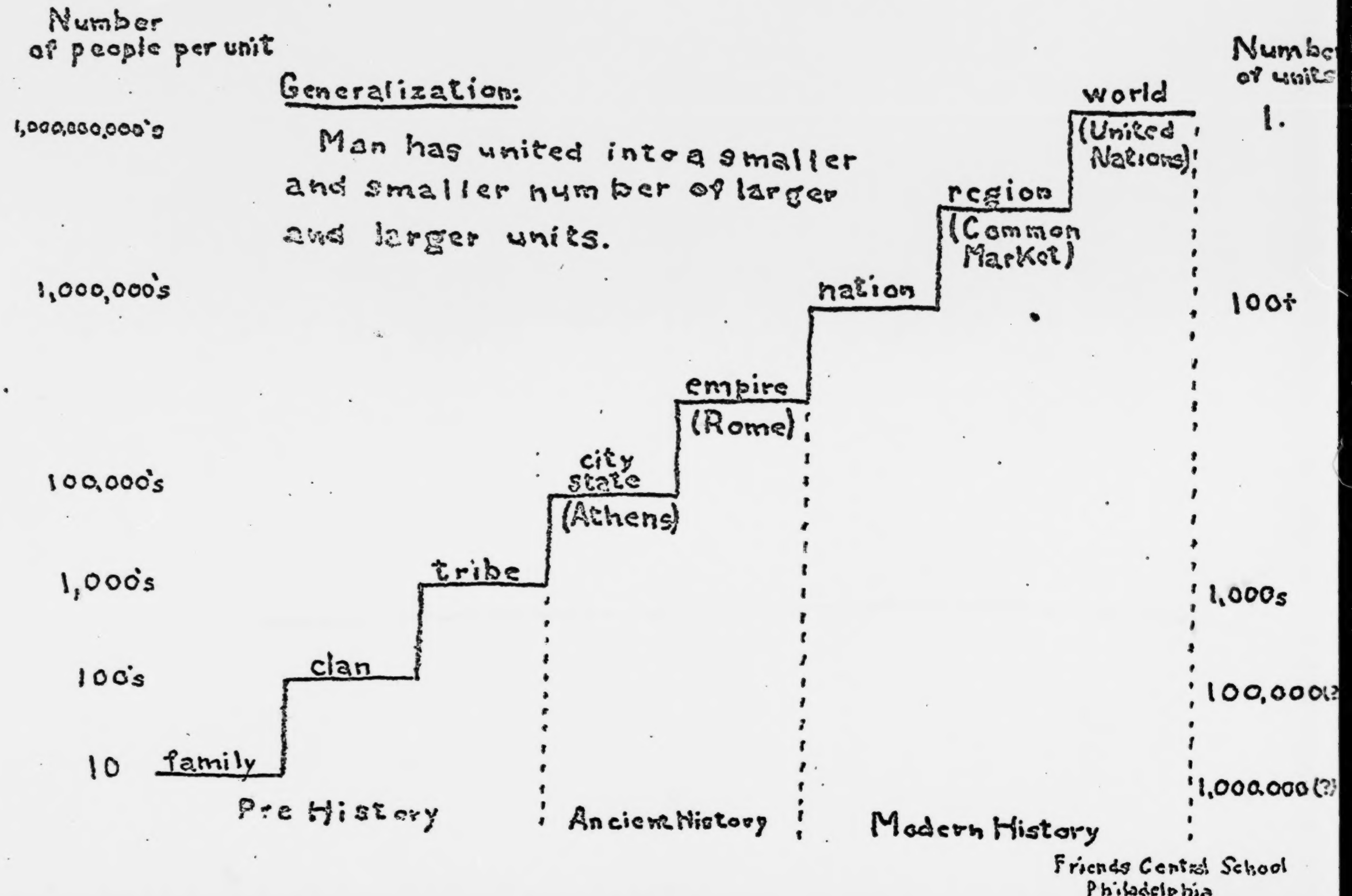
STAGES OF UNIFICATION



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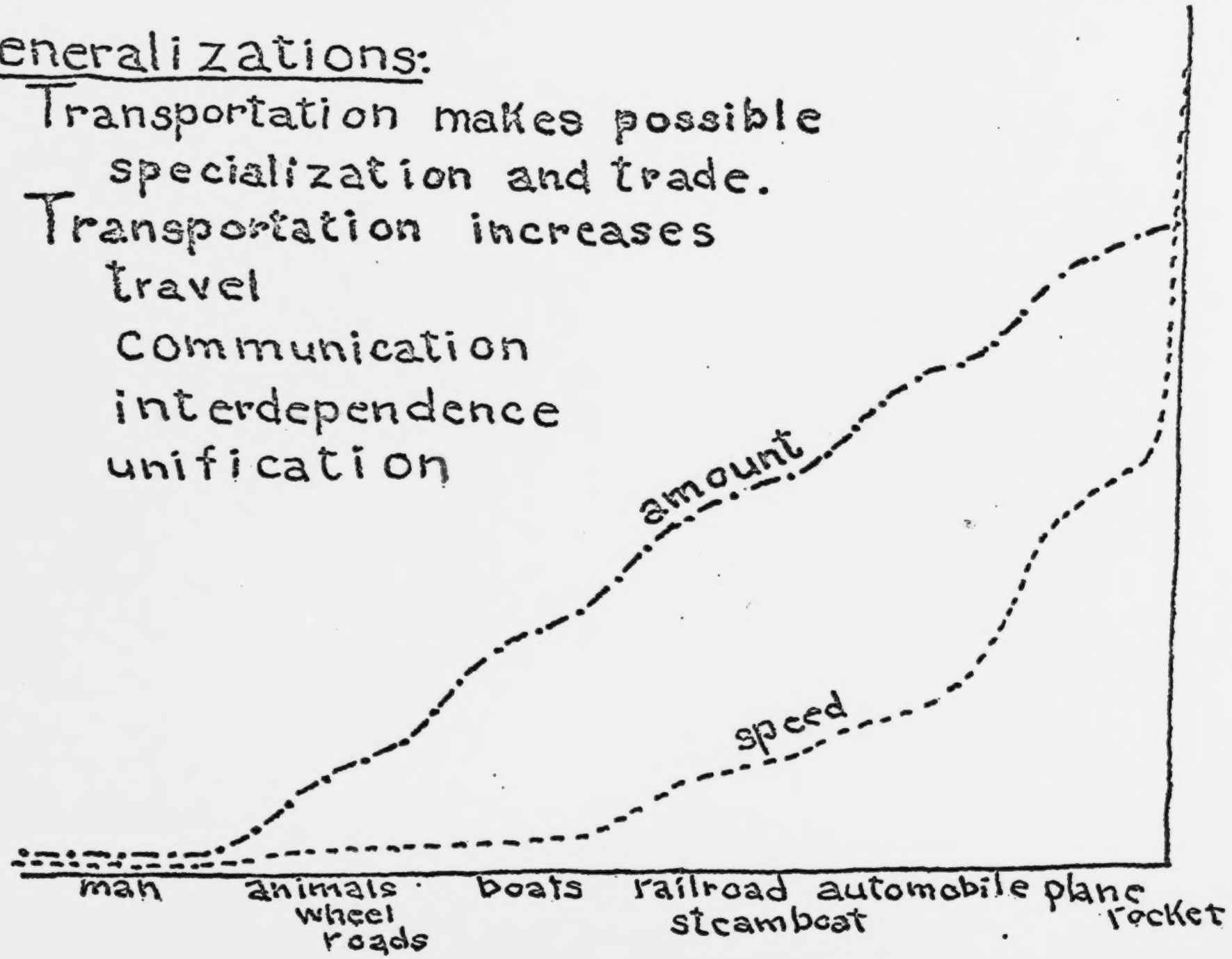
TRANSPORTATION

Generalizations:

Transportation makes possible specialization and trade.

Transportation increases
- travel
- communication
- interdependence
- unification



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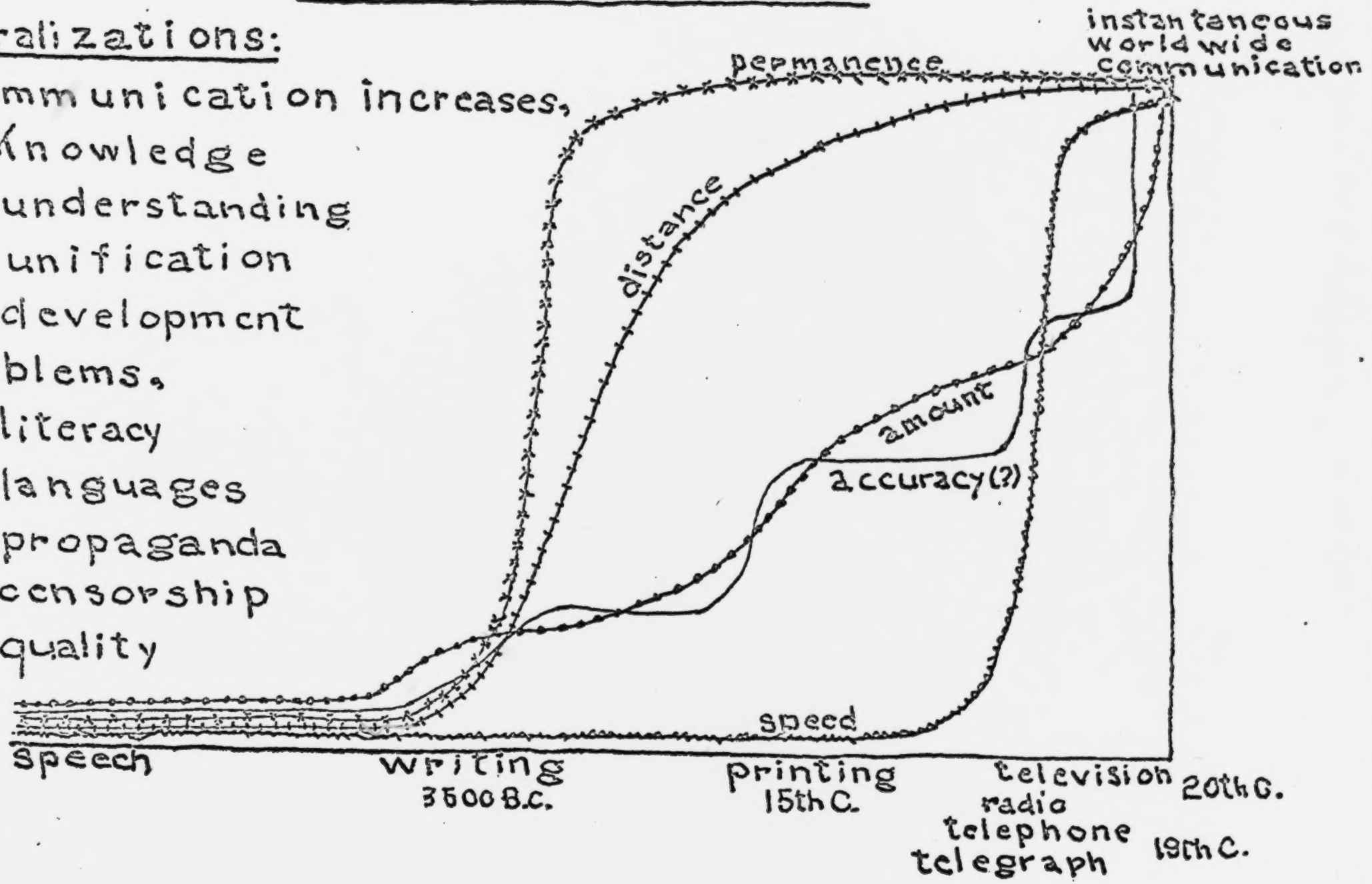
COMMUNICATION

Generalizations:

Communication increases,
- Knowledge
- understanding
- unification
- development

Problems.
- literacy
- languages
- propaganda
- censorship
- quality

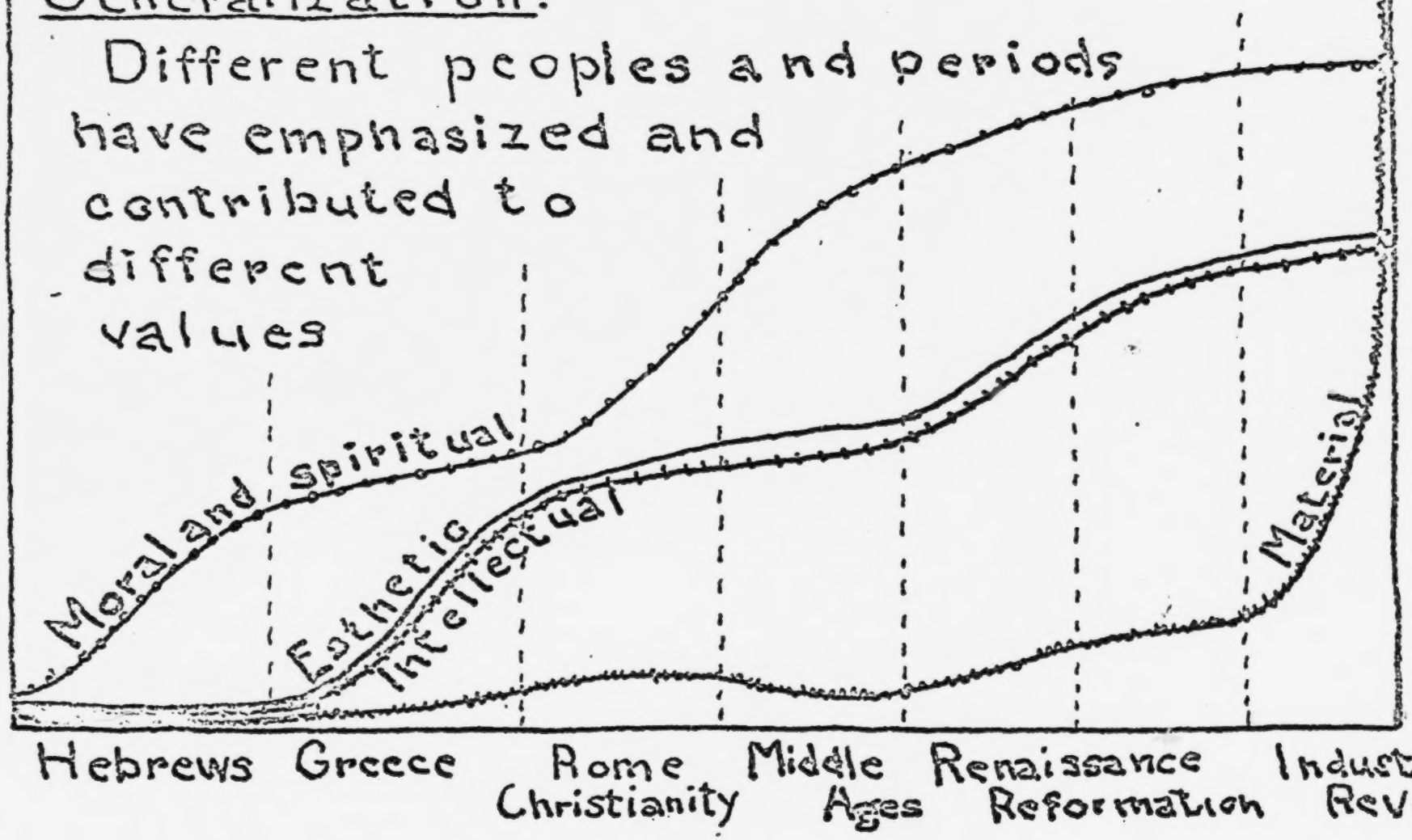


VALUES

Achievements and contributions of different peoples and periods.

Generalization:

Different peoples and periods have emphasized and contributed to different values



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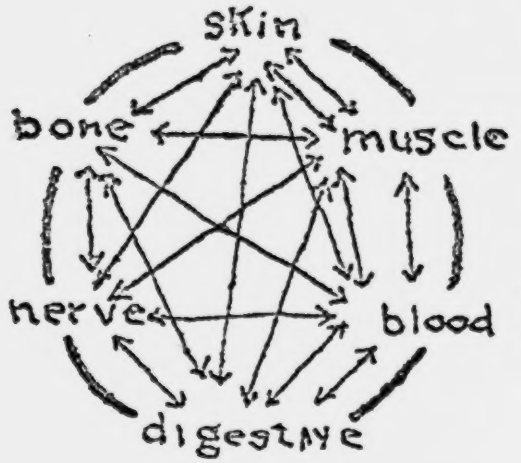
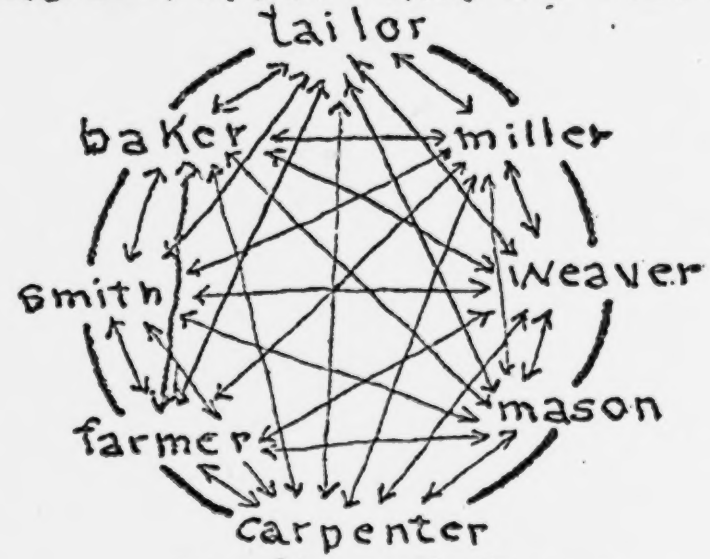
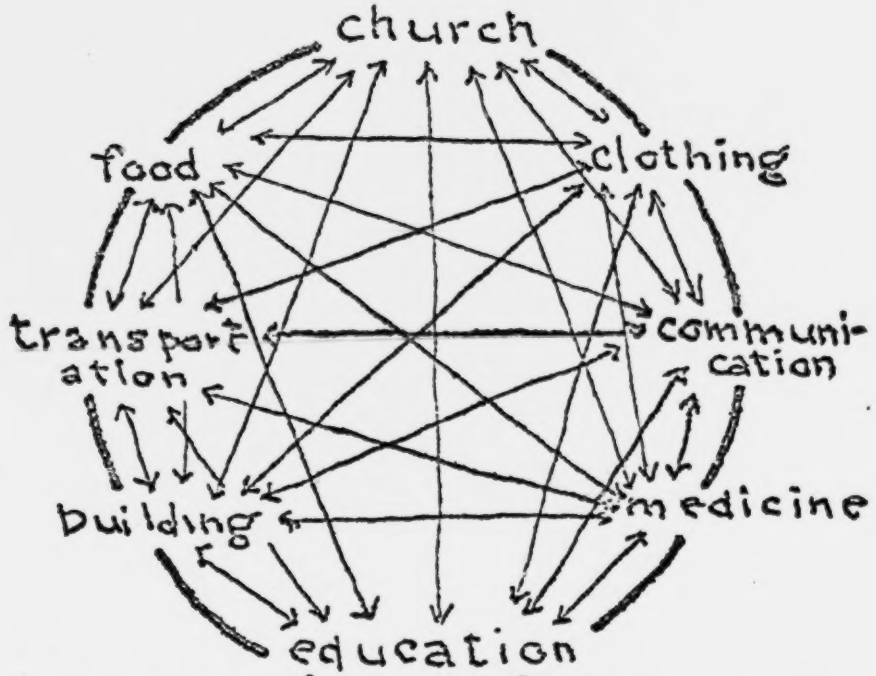
HISTORIC STAGES of SPECIALIZATION, INTERDEPENDENCE, COORDINATION, COOPERATION, REGULATION and GOVERNMENT



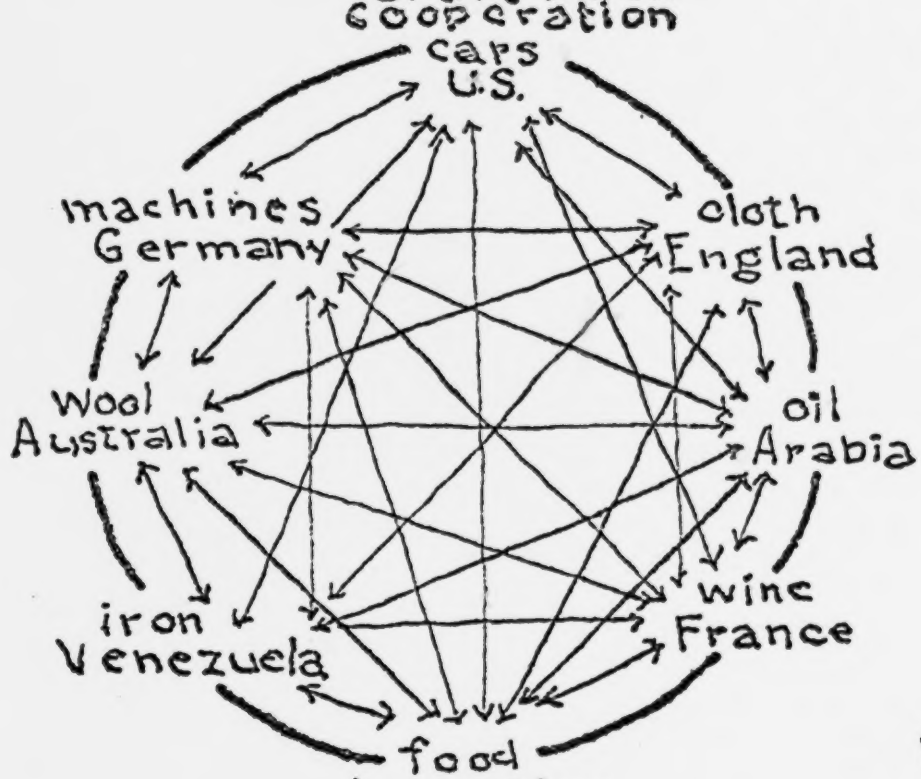
animal
cells
coordination



medieval town
craftsmen
cooperation



modern nation
industries + services
regulation + government



world
products + resources

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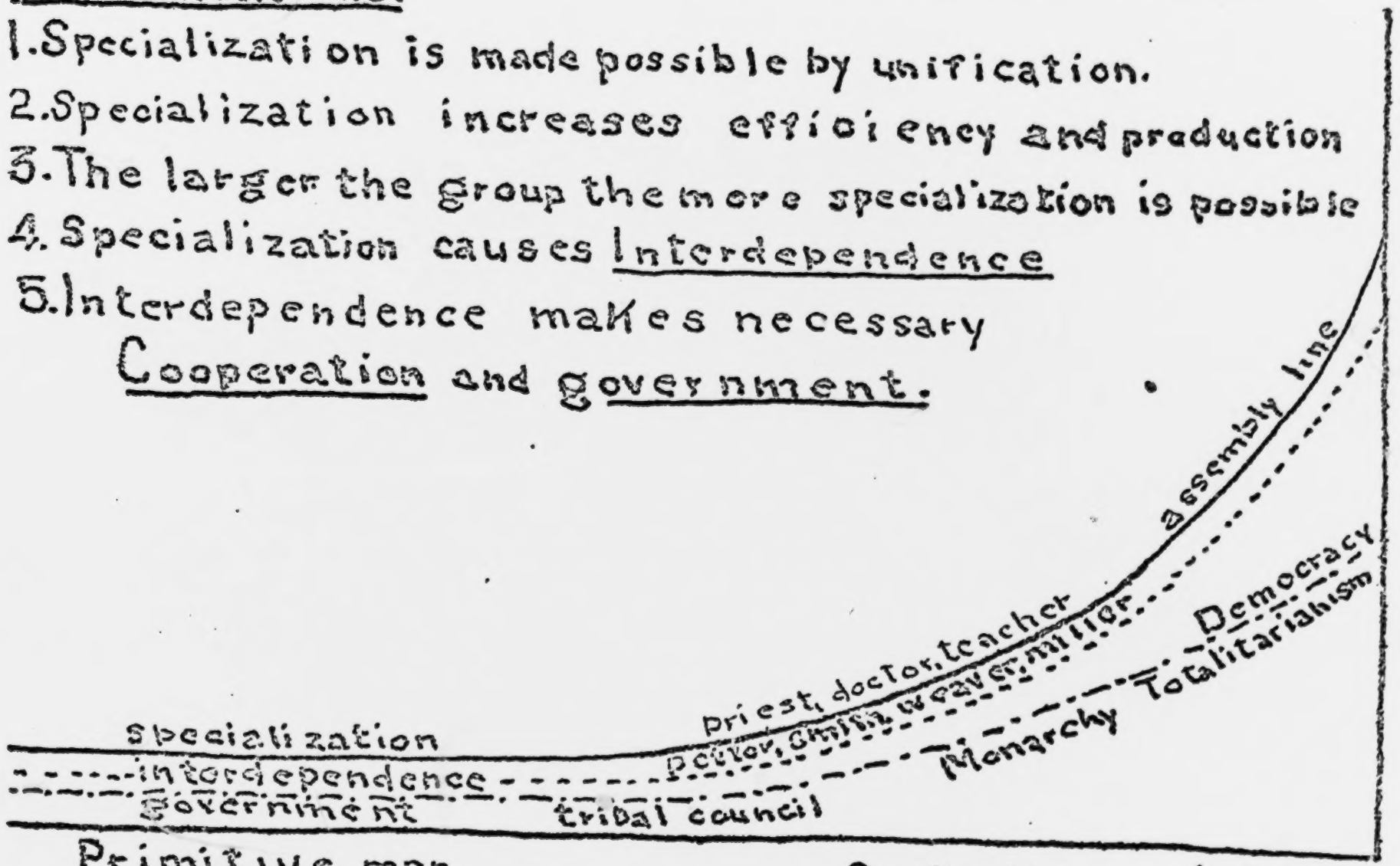
SPECIALIZATION

INTERDEPENDENCE and GOVERNMENT

Generalizations:

1. Specialization is made possible by unification.
2. Specialization increases efficiency and production
3. The larger the group the more specialization is possible
4. Specialization causes Interdependence
5. Interdependence makes necessary Cooperation and government.



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